



Health Advocates, LLC
Professional Training for Professionals

The 15th Annual International Conference on the Health Risks of Youth

(edited 10/27/25)



January 6-9, 2026

Fiesta Americana Puerto Vallarta All Inclusive and Spa

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ICHRY 2026 CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

Tuesday, January 6, 2026

6:30 – 7:30 pm	Welcome Reception (Ballroom Foyer)
7:45 – 8:15 pm	Round Table Sessions – Group A (Vallarta 1 & 2)
8:15 – 8:30 pm	Change Break
8:30 – 9:00 pm	Round Table Sessions – Group B (Vallarta 1& 2)

Wednesday, January 7, 2026

7:30 – 8:30 am	Breakfast (On Your Own: Resort Restaurant)
8:30 – 8:45 am	Introduction & Announcements (Vallarta 1)
8:45 – 9:45 am	Opening Keynote (Vallarta 1)
9:45 – 10:00 am	Break
10:00– 11:00 am	Oral Presentation #1
11:00 - 11:15am	Break
11:15 – 12:15pm	Oral Presentation #2
12:15 pm	Adjourn for the Day

Friday, January 9, 2026

7:30-8:30 am	Breakfast (On Your Own: Resort Restaurant)
8:30 – 8:45 am	Announcements (Vallarta 1)
8:45 – 9:45 am	Closing Keynote (Vallarta 1)
9:45 – 10:00 am	Change Break
10:00– 11:00 am	Oral Presentation #3
11:00 – 11:15am	Break

11:15 – 12:15pm **Oral Presentation 4**

12:15 pm **Conference Adjournment**

ICHRY 2026 DETAILED CONFERENCE AGENDA

Tuesday, January 6, 2026

6:30 – 7:30pm **Welcome Reception and Opening Remarks**
(Ballroom Foyer)

7:30 – 8:00pm **Round Table Sessions – Group A**
(Vallarta 1 and 2)

1) Let's talk about Wellness: Building Systems to Support Youth Health and Well-being in Schools

Amy Carr (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

Explore how schools can strengthen student health and wellness using a practical, research-informed framework. This interactive session introduces the Youth-School Wellness Components Framework (YSWCF), guiding participants through real-world analysis, small group collaboration, and strategic reflection to identify actionable steps that promote whole-child wellness in school systems.

2) Advocating for Evidence-Informed Concussion Prevention, Recognition, and Management in Child and Youth Sport.

John Burns (Washburn University)

Concussion risk in child and youth sport is well documented and remains a concern especially related to healthy, long-term development. Health educators and clinicians at all levels should be informed of the latest concussion prevention, assessment and management recommendations so they can effectively advocate for youth clients with concussion and support appropriate concussion policy within child and youth sport organizations.

3) Why Are Children So Depressed?

Karl Larson (Gustavus Adolphus College)

Rates of diagnosis for depression in children have risen significantly over the past 20 years. This session will review the trends of childhood depression in that time period, discuss the causes as described in the body of research, and explain best practices for the prevention and treatment of depression in children.

4) The WU Moves Community Wellness Program: Updates and Outcomes

Park Lockwood (Washburn University) & Kim Johnson (KJ Therapy, Lawrence, KS)

Chronic disease is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in the United States. One-half of U.S. adults have at least one chronic disease condition and 25 percent have multiple chronic conditions that can lead to a restriction in an ability to do basic daily living activities. Low-income adults have a high incidence of chronic disease that increases with aging due to on-going psychological stress, higher risk exposure, less healthy living conditions and limited access to health services.

Community-based wellness programs, in collaboration with academic institutions, can serve this population by providing access to health services, quality educational and activity-based experiences, and continual assessment and support. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, the expertise of numerous faculty, students, and staff can be utilized to help mitigate a myriad of health conditions presented by this population. The WU Moves Community Wellness Program is an established program that has used the ASSIST model to provide wellness services in its community for nearly 10 years. This presentation will summarize the WU Moves program, provide updated results from those who have participated, and discuss future directions of university- and community-based wellness programs.

5) Building Futures: How Supportive Housing Transforms Youth and Family Outcomes

Rita Ortega-Wiley (Foundation Communities, Austin, TX)

This presentation explores how supportive housing integrated with wraparound services improves youth and family outcomes by addressing social determinants such as housing stability, educational support, access to health services and financial literacy. Participants will examine current supportive service programming at an affordable housing organization and identify strategies to integrate housing solutions into health education and community wellness initiatives.

6) Advancing the Health Education Profession: Sharing the Processes and Outcomes of the Health Education Specialist Practice Analysis III 2025 (HESPA III 2025)

Antonio J. Gardner (University of Alabama) & Bill Datema (Society of Public Health Education)

The HESPA III 2025 was conducted to update and validate the hierarchical model associated with the contemporary framework of practice of health education specialists. Three data collection instruments were developed to assess importance, frequency, and performance expectations. The final validated hierarchical model resulted in revised Areas of Responsibility, Competencies, Sub-Competencies, Knowledge Topics, and Knowledge Statements for the health education profession.

8:00 – 8:15pm

Break

1) Assessing the Behavioral Health Needs Among Firefighters: A Firsthand Qualitative Perspective*Amy LaRue (University of Wisconsin-Superior)*

Firefighters face elevated risks of stress, trauma, and mental health challenges, yet stigma and access barriers often limit support. Drawing on qualitative interviews with firefighters, this session shares what they identify as their most pressing needs, including peer support, confidential counseling, and leadership engagement. Practical recommendations will be shared that are applicable to the surveyed population, and firefighters in general.

2) Stress in the Bloodstream: Gene Expression Signatures of Childhood Maltreatment
Sylvie Mrug (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

Child maltreatment in early life is linked to altered gene expression in immune, neurodevelopmental, and metabolic pathways, potentially increasing adult cardiovascular and psychiatric risk. Findings from this study highlight biological embedding of adversity through transcriptional reprogramming.

3) The Importance of Sleep and the Role of Sound in Sleep Quality*Kim Le-Bard Rankila (University of Wisconsin-Superior)*

This study explores how colored noise and calming music improve sleep for individuals working 24-hour shifts or struggling with poor sleep hygiene. Findings show these sound-based aids enhance sleep onset, duration, and restfulness—colored noise and relaxation music mask disruptive sounds and promotes better sleep hygiene. Results emphasize the importance of personalized auditory interventions to support well-being, long-term health, and recovery in demanding, high-stress environments.

4) Challenges Impacting School Health Since COVID19 - Opportunities and Threats*Retta Evans (University of Alabama at Birmingham)*

In the wake of the COVID19 pandemic, a number of significant issues continue to disrupt student well-being and challenge schools across the United States. Some of the most prevalent issues facing students in elementary, middle and high school include mental health struggles, virtual learning which negatively impacted academic learning, social isolation and loneliness, and continued chronic health conditions. In reality, schools are still dealing with significant learning loss and disruptions to students' social and emotional development from the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss these emergent trends and discuss how school-based health centers, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and other programs show promise in addressing these challenges.

5) A Socioecological Approach to Collegiate Recovery Communities on College Campuses

Jonah Neville (Wake Forest University)

Collegiate Recovery Communities (CRC), communities that provide support for students navigating addiction, have been around since the 1970's on college campuses. Traditional risk factors in the college setting, such as high substance use, can be isolating for students seeking or curious about pursuing recovery. CRC's continue to be a crucial resource for students struggling with addiction during their time in college.

6) Empowering Women in Healthcare and STEM: The WISH (Women in Science and Healthcare) Network and Dallas College Collaboration

Rebecca Currey (Dallas College)

In 2024, Health Wildcatters expanded its WISH Network to promote healthcare innovation and female entrepreneurship through partnerships with seven North Texas universities. This presentation highlights the collaboration between the WISH Network and Dallas College. The initiative fosters a community of like-minded women by providing resources, mentorship, and inspiration from female leaders in healthcare and STEM to young college students. Its goal is to build a strong pipeline of female entrepreneurs, especially from underserved and underrepresented backgrounds.

Adjourn for the Evening

Wednesday, January 7, 2026

7:30 – 8:30am **Breakfast (On Your Own: Resort Restaurant)**

8:30 – 8:45am **Introduction / Announcements**
(Vallarta 1)

8:45 – 9:45am **Opening Keynote**
(Vallarta 1)

Exploring the Use of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Principles Online: Advancing How We Do The “Good Work” and Going Where Few Have Gone Before

Larrell Wilkinson

University of Alabama at Birmingham

Khalia Wilkinson

Developing Alabama Youth Foundation, Inc. (Birmingham, AL)

Forty-one percent of teens with the highest social media use rate their overall mental health as poor/very poor. Thus, it is necessary for social and behavioral scientists to provide social-emotional-mental health promotion where teens spend their time. This presentation describes the approach of using community-based participatory research (CBPR) principles in creating health communication interventions on social media.

9:45 – 10:00am **Break**

10:00 – 11:00am **Oral Presentation #1**

Health Promoting Schools in a Telehealth Context

Kelly Wilson, Whitney Garney, & Beth McNeill (Texas A&M University)

This session explores how the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) approach aligns with the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model and emerging telehealth standards. Presenters will highlight the role of the newly updated National Health Education Standards (NHES, 3rd edition) in integrating health education and behavioral health care within the educational mission. Attendees will gain a deeper conceptual understanding of how telehealth and systems thinking can drive coherence, equity, and sustainability in school-based health promotion.

11:00 – 11:15 am **Break**

Oral Presentation #2

11:15 – 12:15 pm

Ripple Effects: Harm and Healing in Action

Bethany Moore (Community Action, Inc. of Central Texas, Inc.), Cynthia Esparza (Seguin (TX) Independent School District, & Alex Garcia (Stogner and Associates)

Explore the impact of trauma on at-risk youth, from brain development to externalizing behaviors. This interactive session equips participants with trauma-informed, experiential strategies to foster trust, resilience, and self-regulation, transforming cycles of harm into pathways of healing.

According to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), teen girls are confronting the highest levels of sexual violence, sadness, and hopelessness ever reported. The purpose of this presentation is to develop the understanding among school professionals for social-emotional-mental (SEM) triggers among teen girls and provide training to encourage pro-social responses to experienced triggers.

12:15 pm Adjournment

Thursday, January 8, 2026: Cultural Awareness Day (Sightseeing and educational opportunities on your own)

Friday, January 9, 2026

7:30 – 8:30am **Breakfast (On Your Own: Resort Restaurant)**

8:30-8:45am **Introduction / Announcements (Vallarta 1)**

8:45-9:45am **Closing Keynote (Vallarta 1)**

Expanding the Behavioral Health Workforce: UAB's HRSA GPE Grants

Sylvie Mrug (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

This presentation highlights UAB's recently awarded behavioral health workforce education and training grants which cover both graduate and undergraduate programs. In the Graduate Psychology Education program, doctoral students in clinical psychology gain skills in trauma-informed care, integrated practice, cultural competence, and other key areas through interprofessional education and community partnerships. In the Paraprofessional program, undergraduate students enrolled in the mental health certificate program acquire skills and applied experience in community settings to provide behavioral health services to children and families. Both programs can serve as models for addressing workforce shortages and advancing health equity in underserved communities

9:45 - 10:00am **Break**

10:00 – 11:00am **Oral Presentation #3**

Unintended Consequences of Conditional Regard

Amanda Blaisdell (Longwood University)

This presentation examines how conditional regard, which utilizes approval or withdrawal to control youth, fosters insecure attachment, a fragile self-concept, and maladaptive relational patterns. Literature shows that such strategies undermine motivation and foster toxic adult relationships. Educators and caregivers can counteract this by emphasizing unconditional positive regard, supporting secure attachment, authentic achievement, and long-term relational satisfaction.

11:00 – 11:15 am **Break**

11:15 – 12:15pm **Oral Presentation #4**

Health Strategies that Make an Impact

Sunnin Keosybounheuang (Emporia State University)

Health education strategies shared in this session will be sure to leave an impression! Strategy topics are selected from the 10 identified content areas from the CDC and aligned with Kansas benchmarks and National standards. Join us for some strategies you will be able to implement as soon as you get back to your classroom.

12:15 pm Conference Adjournment

Thank You For Your Support!

